

DEPARTMENT OF CALIFORNIA HIGHWAY PATROL

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CHP TARGETS UNSAFE HOLIDAY DRIVERS

Christmas 2000 and New Year's 2001 will find California Highway Patrol (CHP) officers working hard throughout the state to keep motorists safe. According to CHP Commissioner D. O. "Spike" Helmick, "Our officers will be on the road 24/7 this holiday season focusing on drivers whose behavior endangers other motorists or pedestrians."

The CHP will be mounting an all-out effort to prevent collisions caused by drivers who fail to heed the safety messages it delivers throughout the year. "We know that some people will still get behind the wheel after drinking, or they will drive aggressively, or when they are fatigued," the Commissioner said, "I want them to know we will be out there looking for them."

During the two year-end holidays, the CHP Maximum Enforcement Periods (MEP's) will put every available officer on the road to keep motorists safe. For Christmas the MEP begins at 6:01 p.m. on Friday, December 22 and continues through midnight on Monday, December 25. The New Year's MEP will start at 6:01 p.m., Friday, December 29 and finish at midnight on January 1, 2001.

In addition to beefed-up road patrols, CHP officers will also be holding sobriety checkpoints throughout the state to remove impaired drivers from their vehicles before they can hurt or kill someone.

- M O R E -

“In addition to combating these hazardous driving practices, we will also be looking for people who don’t wear a safety belt and making sure all child passengers are buckled into properly installed child safety seats,” Helmick said. “Occupant restraints are the best protection available for you and your passengers should a collision occur.”

California has had a child safety seat law since 1983, and its safety belt law went into effect in 1986 and 1993. These laws permit an officer to make an enforcement stop any time he or she sees any vehicle occupant who is not properly buckled up.

Commissioner Helmick says the message this holiday season from the CHP is simple, “We’re working hard to keep you safe. Make sure you do your part by avoiding alcohol if you plan to drive, obeying speed limits, driving like everyone around you was family, and using your safety belts or child safety seats on every trip – even the shortest ones. Working together we can make this holiday season a happy one.”

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CHP CHRISTMAS/NEW YEAR'S SAFE DRIVING TIPS

- Don't mix alcohol and driving. If you're going to celebrate the season with alcohol, have a designated driver to get you home safely. If you're not going to drink, offer to be a designated driver for a friend or family member.
- Leave early for that Christmas gathering or New Year's party. Watch your speed and remember to treat other drivers like you want to be treated – don't follow too closely and always change lanes safely.
- Make sure you always put that safety belt on before you put your car in gear. Insist that all your passengers do too. And make sure any child that should ride in a properly installed child safety seat is riding in one.
- Don't drive tired. Fatigue can affect your driving as much as alcohol. A tired driver won't react quickly to hazards ahead and his or her judgment will be impaired. If you plan a long trip over the holidays, rest beforehand, take frequent breaks to refresh yourself, and share the driving duties with the others in your vehicle.
- When it's raining, snowing, icy or foggy, slow down and leave 3-4 seconds between your car and the one ahead. Your vehicle can't stop as quickly or maneuver as well, when the road is slick. And you can't react to hazards that you don't see.
- With many people attending parties or family gatherings, be especially watchful for pedestrians – not just at crosswalks, but also around parked cars, near restaurants and in residential areas.
- For road information and safe driving tips go to www.chp.ca.gov

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The California Highway Patrol is a law enforcement and traffic safety agency reporting to Business, Transportation and Housing Agency Secretary Maria Contreras-Sweet and Governor Gray Davis.